DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 378 E& 027 566

AUTHOR

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TITLE

School Development Planning: Problems and

Possibilities. What We Know and What We Have Yet To

Learn.

PUB DATE

Mar 96

NOTE

16p.; Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration Symposium paper presented at the Research Conference of the British Educational Management and Administration Society (Cambridge,

Management and Administration Society (Cambri England, United Kingdom, March 25-27, 1996).

PUB TYPE

Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE

MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS

*Decentralization; Educational Change; Educational Improvement; *Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Governance;

Government School Relationship; Inspection;

*Institutional Autonomy; Long Range Planning; *School

Based Management: Strategic Planning

IDENTIFIERS

*England; *Ontario

ABSTRACT

Local management of schools, parental choice, and accountability were crucial themes of Great Britain's 1988 Education Reform Act. Central government's belief in market forces as the key to sustained systemwide school improvement was further supported by the 1993 Education Act, which increased the variety of school offerings for parental choice by allowing specialization and the selection of pupils by ability. The changes have made it necessary for schools to professionalize their strategic, tactical, and operation planning. However, schools continue to experience difficulties in successfully adopting site-based planning approaches, such as school-development planning. This paper identifies key problems with the school-development planning approach as presently adopted in England and Wales and recently incorporated in the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspection process. It suggests a more effective approach for managing change and school improvement, with a focus on North American literature describing the successful implementation of site-based planning and the school-growth planning approach implemented by a number of school boards in Ontario, Canada. Schools in Great Britain will have to individually determine their strategic direction in the educational market place, identify the type of school that they intend to become, and plan the range of services that they intend to provide. (Contains 38 references.) (Author/LMI)



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"PARTNERS IN CHANGE: SHAPING THE FUTURE"

TITLE OF PAPER:

School Development Planning: Problems and Possibilities: What We Know and What We Have Yet to Learn

AUTHOR:

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School Development Planning: Problems and Possibilities: What We Know and What We Have Yet to Learn

By Corrie Giles.

Abstract

Local Management of Schools, parental choice and accountability for the efficient and effective use of public resources were crucial themes of the 1988 Education Reform Act. As a result schools in England and Wales are now required to operate in a decentralized and increasingly devolved educational market-place

Central government's belief in market forces as the key to sustained system-wide school improvement has been further supported by the 1993 Education Act. This opens the way to establishing a greater variety of schools for parents to choose for their children, by allowing specialization and the selection of pupils on ability. As a result of these developments schools are finding it necessary to profession-alize their strategic, tactical and operational planning capability in order to enhance the range of services that they offer and to improve quality in an increasingly differentiated and competitive market place.

Yet, as recently reported by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), schools are still experiencing difficulties in successfully adopting site-based planning approaches such as school development planning, in what is now a relatively experienced decentralized school system. This paper identifies key problems with the school development planning approach as presently adopted in England and Wales and recently incorporated in the OFSTED inspection process. The paper then moves on to suggest a more effective approach for managing change and school improvement, with particular reference to some of the North American literature on the successful implementation of site-based planning, in particular the school growth planning approach implemented by a number of school boards in Ontatio.

"How best to help schools improve their skills in the processes of development planning is an important challenge facing those engaged in research and development on school effectiveness, improvement, reform or restructuring" (Beresford et al., 1992, p.13).



School Development Planning: Problems and Possibilities: What We Know and What We Have yet to Learn

By Corrie Giles

Initiating Change: Decentralization or Devolution?

With the introduction in the 1988 Education Reform Act of a form of site-based management known as local management of schools (LMS), responsibility for planning the use of resources was transferred from Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to schools within a clearly legislated policy framework determined by central government:

"In essence the British Government have enacted a legislative framework intended to increase efficiency, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and promote the accountability and responsiveness of a much more diverse public school system, through increased competition and parental choice." (Giles, 1995a).

Although the importance of planning at school level was recognized and encouraged at the outset of the LMS initiative, site-based management did not appear to be more than an exercise in decentralization (Coopers and Lybrand/DES 1988). Indeed, DES Circular 7/88, the official guidance for the introduction of the LMS initiative, indicated that it was not the intention to allow schools total freedom to plan the use of their delegated resources, but rather envisaged a transitional strategic planning role for LEAs in ensuring that site-based management was implemented successfully. However, as central government increasingly adopted a strategic planning role by legislating in support of a devolved educational service, an epidemic of mandated change followed on from the 1988 Education Reform Act.

Understandably, in such rapidly changing circumstances the ability of LEAs to fulfil their statutory responsibility under the 1988 Education Reform Act to monitor progress and provide support and advice in implementing the new legislation was considerably reduced.



The Focus of LEA Support

Wallace (1991), in a key paper, suggests that a number of factors came together during this difficult transitional period which influenced the purpose of the site-based planning approach adopted by some LEAs. Firstly, LEAs were faced with a need to collect a wide range of information for the Department of Education and Science (DES) as evidence of compliance with centrally imposed reform, in particular:

- financial information concerning LMS;
- information concerning National Curriculum implementation, and
- information to form the basis of bids for grant aid towards staff development in centrally determined national educational priority areas.

Secondly, a growing number of controls relating to aspects of site-based planning were being imposed on schools via LEAs, through legislation, statutory orders and "earmarked" development grants.

Reference to three key DES circulars serve to illustrate the lack of focus on school development planning, particularly planning for school improvement and development, at the outset of the LMS initiative:

- DES Circular 5/88 required schools to have a Staff Development Plan;
- DES Circular 7/88 required schools to have a financial Management Plan, approved by the school governors and developed in conjunction with the headteacher, and collective support of the school staff;
- DES Circular 5/89 required LEAs to ensure, as a condition of receiving grants for supporting the introduction of the National Curriculum, that their schools produce a National Curriculum Development Plan.

From the perspective of schools struggling with the new responsibilities of LMS, circulars such as these seemed to arrive on an almost daily basis, and made long-range planning of improvement and development appear a somewhat pointless activity.

However, a booklet on school development plans (SDPs) produced by the DES funded "School Development Plans Project" (DES, 1989a) was eventually produced and circulated to all schools, although this did not arrive until the second year of the LMS initiative. The booklet provided useful advice on the role of SDPs in the strategic management of schools, and stressed the importance of a coherent planning process for



managing school improvement and development as well as change.

Unfortunately, the advice in the DES booklet was somewhat at odds with the experience of some LEA schools who found their planning time dominated by:

• simplistic LEA planning proforma more in tune with the data collection needs of the LEA than the strategic management of the resources of the school;

 an overwhelming concern for implementing the structure and content of the National Curriculum, and

an approach to planning which was concerned with tactical and operational issues concerning the budget, rather than strategic management.

Nevertheless, school development planning continued to be advocated from a number of 3ources, including a second report circulated to all schools by the "School Development Plans Project" (DES, 1991), as well as by a number of key authors from the academic community (Holly and Southworth, 1989; Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991; West and Ainscow, 1991; Davies and Ellison, 1992).

Typically the site-based planning process was represented in the literature as consisting of three types of planning activity:

 corporate planning where the strategic thinking of the school governors and senior staff clearly link with the priorities identified in the current SDP (Beare, Caldwell and Millikan, 1989; Fidler, Bowles and Hart, 1989);

 the tactical planning of the use of resources to bring about improvement and development in the school;

 a concern for implementation by means of operational action plans which focus on realizing the priorities identified in the SDP.

These three types of planning are integrated by the school planning cycle, a process which is closely linked to the school budget so that priorities may be systematically resourced and implemented through a series of action plans (Giles, 1995b).

However, carrying out, integrating and implementing the three types of planning in a school requires high-order management skills. Given the often frenetic working conditions of schools, it is questionable whether such an approach to planning, as presently conceived in the UK is actually practicable (see Hargreaves and Hopkins, op.cit.; Davies and



Ellison, op.cit., and Giles, 1996 for recommended approaches).

Planning in Practice

Although LEAs and schools claimed to have successfully adopted the SDP approach, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in an early report on the implementation of the National Curriculum in primary schools, noted that:

"Progress in drawing up, and the quality of, school development plans varied markedly. As might be expected (sic), in authorities where development plans had been requested for some time the schools had less difficulty adjusting to the additional planning requirements than those with no experience. Most of the schools needed to relate their school development plans more closely to the requirements of the whole school curriculum, including the National Curriculum, and to identify the curricular demands upon individual teachers" (DES, 1989b, p. 10).

Neither have OFSTED been subsequently impressed by the quality of site-based planning in schools. In 1992, as part of a four year cycle of inspection, OFSTED made it compulsory for schools to have a school development plan and a coherent planning process. The Department For Education (DFE) have also issued a separate Circular (Circular 7/93) to spell out clearly the role of planning once a school inspection has taken place!

However, recent research by Giles (1995a), başed on a convenience survey of 106 primary and secondary schools in England and Wales, suggest that despite the efforts of OFSTED to make schools plan, the SDP approach is still proving less than satisfactory.

The researcher used a questionnaire based on the characteristics of an effective SDP outlined in the literature and the OFSTED "Handbook for the Inspection of Schools" (1992). The research focused upon the site-based planning process as evidence of the extent to which teachers understood the role of planning in managing change, improvement and development in a devolved school system.

A number of themes emerged from the results which indicated a need for further research in this area. In too many cases:



 planning was ad hoc and incremental, with little whole-school planning taking place;

 schools were reacting to change rather than assuming the responsibility for future improvements and

developments;

 there appeared to be little conscious management activity to link strategic aims and objectives of the school with resources, to implement the priorities identified in the SDP;

 SDPs were in effect a list of curriculum content dominated 'jobs to do', rather than a list of agreed priorities for improvement and development which were being systematically resourced and implemented;

implementation of policy decisions was likely to be very patchy because action plans had not been

introduced throughout the school;

• there did not seem to be any systematic evaluation of the progress towards implementation of the SDP, or gathering of hard data on which to base future planning decisions.

Although not generalizable to the school population as a whole, this research suggested that in about half of the schools surveyed there was little knowledge or understanding of the role of planning in integrating the three types of planning necessary for managing change in self managing schools.

If it Doesn't Work, Control it Some More

Certainly, in terms of change theory, the failure of schools to plan properly in the aftermath of so much mandated change was hardly surprising. Central government had not given sufficient thought to the difficulties likely to be encountered initiating and managing system wide restructuring, nor of the importance of the role of LEAs in providing adequate support for the implementation process in order to ensure sustainable reform:

"Governments cannot mandate implementation, and the more remote they are from the local scene the less influential they will be" (Fullan, 1991, p. 262).

However, the present government seems preoccupied with introducing measures to ensure the compliance of LEAs and schools with mandated change, rather than the provision of long-term support to build a capacity in schools for managing self-improvement and development - the essence of the



LMS initiative.

Indeed, recent government legislation, statutory orders and "advice" have signalled a move towards Management By Objectives (MBO) as the preferred management tool for performance control in schools. Specific examples of this tendency include:

- the introduction of performance appraisal for teachers;
- the linking in DES Circular 12/91 of staff appraisal outcomes in schools to the SDP;
- the changes in the pay structure of teachers recommended by the 1993 School Teachers Review Body emphasizing salary enhancements for specific short-term responsibilities;
- the introduction of performance related pay, and
- the insistence by OFSTED that senior staff and teachers in schools have specific job descriptions.

Although MBO was a much advocated technique in the late 1970's, MBO now attracts considerable criticism. Even so, there is considerable similarity between MBO and the 'performance planning' approach presently being promoted by OFSTED (1992) in their efforts to encourage schools in England and Wales to professionalize their planning process.

Murgatroyd and Morgan (1993, pp. 130-140) provide a concise description and critique of the MBO approach. In essence MBO was promoted as a means of managing performance by setting annual objectives for each individual employee, which conform to the goals and plans of the school and the needs of the managers responsible for implementing those goals.

The underlying purpose of MBO is very much located in scientific management theory ie. management control through goal setting, although the goal setting is usually of a superficial task/output nature. The goals are also linked to an annual performance appraisal of staff, with the function of the line management relationship to match organizational and, if possible, personal objectives to enhance individual motivation.

Although MBO emulates a number of interactive and participative approaches to managing change through planning, the time consuming paper driven bureaucracy of MBO has proved problematic in achieving successful implementation of change:

"... there is a growing realization that many organizations that have adopted MBO are permanently failing as organizations... That is, the objectives set do not represent what employees know



they are capable of, or indeed what the organization really needs to achieve to obtain outstanding performance. Instead they represent compromises between possibility and 'do-ability', between tradition and incremental improvement. MBO can be seen as the hallmark of gradualism and sub-optimization" (Murgatroyd and Morgan, op.cit., p. 132).

Control vs Empowerment

The Investors in People (IIP) project is a more recent attempt using the on-going support of external consultants to improve implementation success. The scheme, originally launched by the Department of Employment (DOE), firmly links goals, organizational objectives and intended outcomes through the strategic planning process and has the attraction of providing business, commerce and schools with a quality kite mark (see Sallis, 1993 for background details of the IIP scheme). However, a careful study of the IIP documentation reveals a distinctly rationalistic sub-culture in which the term 'quality control' should really be substituted for the term 'quality assurance' so favored in the IIP literature.

The need for implementation success reflected in the IIP approach represents a move towards the incorporation of strategic planning into the change process. In such approaches, planning having meaning for those engaged in the process, is seen more and more as a vehicle for successfully initiating and bringing about sustainable change (see Fullan, op.cit.; Hargreaves, 1994). This emerging 'high engagement' approach to planning is intended as a means of replacing 'planning for control and action'. It recognizes the importance of change theory, in particular the provision of considerable external support for schools in planning as and for improvement and development.

A Need For Further Research

Although OFSTED now insists on the production of SDPs as evidence of the efficient, effective and economic use of resources, and schools have to be able to demonstrate a coherent planning process, it is questionable whether the spectre of inspection will do little more than improve the mechanics of the planning process in individual schools.

Certainly a large body of research in North America suggests that support for schools in engaging teachers in planning



which has meaning for teachers will bring about sustainable change, especially when change is acknowledged and managed as a learning process (Sackney, 1986). Crandal, Eisman and Seashore Louis (1986) support this view, and provide a coherent discussion of a range of strategic planning issues which need to be considered if successful school improvement planning is to occur. More specifically Levine and Leibert (1987) warn of the negative outcomes that result from requirements to prepare annual school improvement plans.

Although there are results from a number of large scale studies of school improvement through school improvement planning in the North American literature, the approach to site-based planning observed by the researcher in Halton School Board, Ontario, and reported by Canadian researchers in the school effectiveness and improvement literature (see Fullan, Bennett, and Rolheiser-Bennett, 1990; Stoll, 1992a; Stoll, 1992b; Stoll and Fink, 1992; Fink and Stoll, 1993; Stoll and Fink, 1994), contrasts sharply with the approach to site-based planning which has emerged in England and Wales. The role of the Halton School Board in supporting site-based planning in their schools, and yet learning themselves through working with schools in a school effectiveness partnership with higher education, seems to have much to offer in terms of informing more effective practice in the UK.

The apparent success of the site-based planning observed on a recent study tour in Halton seems to have been dependent in part upon:

 a clear link between planned change and research into school effectiveness and school improvement.

the provision of LEA support of site-based planning as

a learning process.

 developing the capacity of teachers to better understand the role of change theory in successful school reform.

 focussing on change which had meaning for, and therefore the commitment of, teachers.

This teacher-centered (professional learning and empowerment) approach to managing planned educational change, contrasts sharply with enforced compliance, which appears to be the preferred approach to restructuring in England and Wales. So often empowerment in the UK appears to be a 'one way street' in which central government attempts to ever more directly mandate and control change in schools. The 'hijacking' of the SDP approach to school improvement as an evaluation tool by OFSTED, and the linking of Grants for Educational Support and Training (GEST) funding in DFE Circular 18/94 to specific items in individual school develop-



ment plans, are recent examples which appear to underline the belief of government in a Fayolian approach to innovation and change in schools.

The Response of the Schools

The cumulative impact of so much control, thinly disguised as reform, has been to tarnish the LMS initiative, to the extent that rather than empowering teachers and schools in the change process, structural reforms like site-based management are looking to teachers increasingly like a means of government manipulation rather than empowerment:

"... school-based management is no longer an avenue of empowerment, but a conduit for blame" (Hargreaves, op.cit., p. 68).

In such an atmosphere it is hardly surprising that mandated site-based planning initiatives are not seen as practical by schools, and that on-going fiscal restraint focusses planning activity upon the budget to such an extent that the budget becomes the school plan.

Perhaps, rather than subjecting schools to the paradox of increased devolution and yet further restrictions which control what they do, it is time to return to the original recommendations of the Coopers and Lybrand Report (op.cit.), which was to provide schools with a strategic framework within which they merely make tactical and operational planning decisions concerning the utilization of resources for implementing change. This point has been made previously by Beare, Caldwell and Milikan (op.cit.) who argue that:

"What is required, then, is school-based management within a framework of a corporate plan for the system as a whole" (p. 37).

Indeed, a recent report by Geraldine Hackett (Times Educational Supplement 1/12/95 p.1) on the Labour Party's blue-print for overhauling education, 'Excellence for Everyone', signals a move by the Labour Party, if returned to power, to return a strategic planning role to LEAs. Labour Party policy envisages education authorities producing development plans every three years, detailing how standards will be raised. These strategic plans would need the approval of the Education and Employment Secretary, and action would be taken against those that failed to reach national targets. Unfortunately, this approach is, once again, more concerned with ensuring compliance, than with empowering schools with the capacity to really change:



"The ... preoccupation with compliance hinders implementation in that it diverts energies and attention away from developing local capacity to make improvements. ... Stated another way, if a program is not working in certain settings, governments should know whether the reasons have more to do with competing priorities, and lack of resources, skills and leadership (ie capacity issues) or with diversion of funds, outright resistance, etc (ie compliance) If capacity is the problem, increased surveillance will not help and may hinder actual implementation" (Fullan, op.cit., p.283,).

Conclusion

How to support schools in developing their capacity to change, and at the same time manage improvement and development, is increasingly important in England and Wales. Recent government thinking, outlined in the White Paper "Choice and Diversity" (HMSO, 1992), has further stressed the autonomy of schools (at least from local government. In the light of this new legislation, schools will have to assess the planning implications of the impending demise of LEAs; the creation in April 1994 of the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS); open discussions over the introduction of voucher schemes; and renewed pressures from central government for schools to opt for grant maintained status.

Within these very clear centrally mandated policy parameters, schools will have to individually determine their strategic direction in the educational marketplace, identify the type of school that they intend to become, and plan the range of services that they intend to provide. This will require a more searching review of the role of, and approach to, planning than currently being undertaken in response to OFSTED, and a wider appreciation of the significance of planning in the on-going process of school improvement and development.

More importantly, government need to look again at their attempts to mandate reform, and perhaps consider more carefully experiences gained elsewhere, particularly in North America.

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